

(9/21):

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## Jason Aldean stretches his envelope with 'They Don't Know' (CD review)



CLEVELAND, Ohio – Jason Aldean was sharp enough or lucky enough – there's a lot of both involved in making it in the mainstream country music business – to realize that such songs as "Big Green Tractor," "Hicktown" and "Dirt Road Anthem" would resonate with fans.

"Resonate with fans." That's code for "make money."

There's nothing wrong with that. Shoot, I like what I do, but I don't do it for my health, either.

But there comes a time in any creative endeavor when you have to step outside that, or at least you're tempted to do so. For me, maybe it'll be a book. Or I'll take up crocheting. Probably safer for all.

For Aldean, it's "They Don't Know," the seventh studio album and his third to debut at the top of Billboard's Top 200 Albums charts for the country singer who closes out the Blossom Music Center season on Friday.

Country singer Jason Aldean, whose new album "They Don't Know" debuted at No. 1 on Billboard's Top 200 Albums chart, closes out the 2016 Blossom Music Center concert season on Friday, Sept. 23.

The album, with its big hit "A Little More Summertime," has a lot of the familiar feel of Aldean's previous work, but there's some depth to it that quite honestly has been lacking in earlier efforts.

Don't get me wrong; this isn't country's answer to Bob Dylan. But neither is it an ode to Daisy Dukes or another redneck version of "99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall."

There's an honesty in the opening track, "Lights Come On," that's pretty refreshing, especially since among the co-writers are Florida Georgia Line's Brian Kelley and Tyler Hubbard, who aren't exactly known for mature fare.

The album is most definitely Aldean, especially on the lone track he wrote, "The Way a Night Should Feel," which has more rock-style guitar than the rest of the CD. And yet there are songs such as "This Plane Don't Go There" and "Any Ol' Barstool" that slip closer to "Amarillo Sky" than "Hicktown."

"First Time Again," a duet with country newcomer Kelsea Ballerini, has a sweetness that's lacking in a lot of vocal pairings, and honestly may be one of the two best cuts on the album. The reason for that just might be that Ballerini can truly sing, so even though it's Aldean's album, he's pushed to match her, and is up to the task.

No. 1 on that list, though, is "A Little More Summertime." The imagery in the lyric is wonderful. Of course, that may be because I hate winter, so the idea of summer coming to an end just drives me into a conniption fit. But I think it's more because it really is an extended metaphor for a lost love that's faded with the season.

It's a concept far beyond the hick-hop that has pervaded previous albums, and shows hope for future ones. Grade B+